

AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

This listing of the claims will replace all prior versions and listing of the claims in this application.

Listing of the Claims:

1. (Original) A seal structure for sealing the inlet/exit gate passageway of an elongated object (1) exiting a process cavity (A, B) or entering such a cavity, the seal structure comprising sheet-metal structures, which essentially delineate said passageway and are removably mounted on the frame structure (3) of said process cavity, and a sweeping seal element (13) held in place by said sheet-metal structures and enclosing said passageway so as to provide a seal against the outer surface of the object traveling through the passageway, **characterized** in that said sheet-metal structures comprise at least two sheet-metal elements (14, 15, 15x) that have a shape taperingly departing from the frame structure (3) of said process cavity so as to be inclined in the nominal travel direction of the object (1) and are kept compressed mutually against each other so as to clamp a seal element (13, 13x) therebetween.
2. (Original) The seal structure of claim 1, **characterized** in that the angle of inclination (α) of the sheet-metal elements in regard to a plane perpendicular to the longitudinal axis of the object (1) being processed is 15° to 20°.
3. (Original) The seal structure of claim 1, **characterized** in that said sheet-metal elements have a flaringly swaged outer rim portion or the like integral part in a close vicinity of their outer periphery.

4. (Original) The seal structure of claim 3, **characterized** in that said flaringly swaged outer rim portion of said sheet-metal elements has a flaring angle (β) of about 15° in regard to the longitudinal axis of the object (1) being processed.

5. (Currently amended) The seal structure of ~~any one of foregoing claims~~ claim 1, **characterized** in that said sheet-metal elements (14, 15, 15x) are pieces of rotation of a substantially equal shape.

6. (Original) The seal structure of claim 5, **characterized** in that said sheet-metal elements (14, 15, 15x) form a conically stacked structure.

7. (Original) The seal structure of claim 5, **characterized** in that said seal structure includes elements having curved portions.

8. (Currently amended) The seal structure of ~~any one of foregoing claims~~ claim 1, **characterized** in that said mutual compression of the sheet-metal structures (14, 15, 15x) against each other is accomplished by means of the mounting (16) of the sheet-metal elements to the frame structure (3) of the process cavity.

9. (Currently amended) The seal structure of ~~any one of foregoing claims~~ claim 1, **characterized** in that said mutual compression of the sheet-metal structures (14, 15, 15x) against each other is accomplished by means of separate clamp elements (18, 18x).

10. (Currently amended) The seal structure of ~~any one of foregoing claims~~ claim 1, **characterized** in that said sheet-metal elements (15, 15x) have guide projections (19) directed toward said seal elements (13, 13x).

11. (Currently amended) The seal structure of ~~any one of foregoing claims~~ claim 1, **characterized** in that said sheet-metal element (15, 15x) has a friction-improving treatment on the surface (20) thereof forming the sealing interface between said sheet-metal element and said seal element (13, 13x).

12. (Currently amended) The seal structure of ~~any one of foregoing claims~~ claim 1, **characterized** in that said sheet-metal elements (14, 15, 15x) have a leakproofness-improving treatment on the surface thereof forming the sealing interface between said sheet-metal element and said seal element (13, 13x).

13. (Original) The seal structure of claim 1, **characterized** in that the spaces between said sheet-metal elements (14, 15, 15x) are brought to a vacuum.

14. (Original) The seal structure of claim 13, **characterized** in that the spaces between said sheet-metal elements (14, 15, 15x) are provided with channels extending up to the spaces between the seal elements (13, 13x).